

Sensoriality, Social Interaction, and “Doing sensing” in Physical–Cultural Ethnographies

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Abstract

As recently highlighted, despite a burgeoning field of sensory ethnography, the practices, production, and accountability of the senses in specific social interactional contexts remain sociologically under-explored. To contribute original insights to a literature on the sensuous body in physical–cultural contexts, here we adopt an ethnomethodologically sensitive perspective to focus on the accomplishment, social organization, and accountability of sensoriality in interaction. Exploring instances of the senses at work in social interaction, we utilize data from two ethnographic research projects to investigate the production of running-together and swimming-together by skilled, experienced practitioners. We focus on two interlinked sensory modalities: auditory attunement, and vision and intercorporeality, identified as key dimensions of sensory embodiment and “togetherness” in these particular domains.

Keywords

ethnomethodology, sociology of the senses, distance running, performance swimming, ethnography of sport and physical cultures

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Introduction

The importance of subjecting to detailed sociological analysis of our mundane, everyday practices has recently been highlighted with regard to the sensing body, and the senses as played out in social interaction (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2017; Gibson and vom Lehn 2019; Sparkes 2017; Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2013). In this article, drawing on two ethnographic studies, we address the ways in which sensory interaction is done, produced, and “worked,” in terms of being interpreted, made sense of, and communicated between individuals in particular settings. To exemplify and ground our discussions, we focus on two distinctive physical-cultural activities that share a common concern with “doing-together”: training-together in recreational distance running and in performance swimming. We do so in order to illuminate some of the practices in which runners and swimmers engage in order to accomplish doing-together as an intersubjective and intercorporeal achievement. Here, it is not so much sensory ethnography more widely on which we focus, but rather it is the accountability of the senses as embodied *interactional* phenomena—observable and communicated in social interaction—in which we are interested; a domain that is currently under-researched (Gibson and vom Lehn 2019; Hammer 2015). It is the “seen-but-unnoticed” (Garfinkel 1967) that we wish to render explicit. This is particularly the case with regard to the social organization of the senses, and sensoriality as rendered recognizable and *accountable* to other social actors, or members (in ethnomethodological terms), in specific situations.

Here, we employ an under-utilized framework to contribute fresh perspectives to a developing ethnographic literature on sensory embodiment in physical-cultural contexts, by drawing on ethnomethodological sensibilities to explore data from our ethnographic research projects.¹ Subjecting these data to ethnomethodologically inspired analysis, we investigate the role of the senses in enabling the joint production of running and swimming as interactional activities. This, we argue, requires sustained sensory work (often complex and nuanced), between co-runners and co-swimmers in order to achieve and sustain the activity *together*. While the projects were not originally conceived as ethnomethodological, utilizing an ethnomethodologically-inspired perspective allows us to analyze in detail the activities of running- and swimming-together as socially produced via sensorially-attuned embodiment, intercorporeality, and interaction. Here, we use the term ethnomethodology (EM) to refer to the study of the “methods of members in the situated practices of their on-going activities in the local production of ‘order’” (Jenkins 2020, 1), focusing on the production of features of everyday life in actual, concrete settings, as exhorted by Maynard (2012). We also draw on Merleau-Ponty’s

(1964) notion of intercorporeality (*intercorporéité*) as the lived body in interaction with other bodies.

In combining an EM perspective with ethnographic research, we follow a strong tradition in the UK, drawing on the work of authors such as John Hughes of Lancaster University (e.g., Benson and Hughes 1983), and Wes Sharrock of Manchester University (e.g., Sharrock and Anderson 1986; Sharrock and Randall 2004, 2016), along with many others (see Randall, Rouncefield, and Tolmie 2020 for a recent discussion of ethnography and EM). We fully acknowledge, however, that there are tensions in this particular nexus and that lively debates continue regarding the compatibility of EM and ethnography (see e.g., Hammersley 2019; Jenkins 2020). As sociologists of everyday life such as Zimmerman and Pollner (1973) have long observed, the routine, mundane, concrete practices of the interaction order are sociologically important, but often under-researched and left unproblematicized, which is exactly where EM addresses the gap. Ethnomethodologists are resolutely *not* concerned with producing sociological or anthropological theories, abstractions, or explanations. Rather, the ethnomethodological purpose is to “describe the operational theories, or theories-in-use, that members deploy in attending to the appearances of their surroundings, in constructing their situated courses of action” (Sharrock and Watson 1988, 127). In subjecting to analysis such everyday practices, however, we can (should we so wish) provide relatively abstract sociological theories with empirically detailed, data-rich descriptions. These can then be incorporated into more abstract generalizations about phenomena, in order to ground them firmly in lived reality (Craig 2003).

To date, ethnomethodologically contoured investigations of physical-cultural contexts and practices remain relatively rare. To give a flavor, this small but richly-detailed corpus includes studies of rock-climbing (Jenkins 2013), soccer (Fele 2008), and soccer coaching (Corsby and Jones 2020), boxing (Coates 1999), Kung Fu (Girton 1986), yachting (Button and Sharrock 2013), high-altitude mountaineering (Burke, Sparkes, and Allen-Collinson 2008), and distance running (Allen-Collinson 2008; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2006), to give a feel for the span of such research. Many of these studies are deemed hybrid (Rouncefield and Tolmie 2013) in that the EM researchers are also skilled practitioners of the physical cultures under investigation. Here, as experienced practitioners ourselves, our goal is to explore distance running and pool-based, performance swimming as “interactionally co-ordinated and ‘locally accomplished’ forms of social action” (Coates 1999, 14) that require considerable “sensory work” (e.g., Allen-Collinson and Owton 2015); that is, the interactional work required actively and agentially to make sense of our bodily and sensory experiences. To address our aim, we begin with a brief

overview of developments in the sociology of the senses, especially germane to the sensory aspects of physical cultures, before delineating the ethnomethodologically sensitive framework deployed. We then follow this with details of the ethnographic projects from which our data are drawn, and subsequently structure salient findings under two themes: 1) auditory attunement; 2) vision and intercorporeality.

Sensoriality and Sporting Embodiment

The rapid development of social-scientific interest in the senses has been well-documented; a “sensorial revolution” as Howes (2006) aptly describes this burgeoning. This revolutionary force brings together scholars from anthropology, sociology, geography, and other social sciences, to examine the specificities of sensory bodies and sensoriality across cultures (e.g., Classen 1993; Howes 1991, 2006; Low 2012; Paterson 2007; Pink and Howes 2010; Vannini et al. 2011) and physical cultures (e.g., Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2009; Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2015; McNarry et al. 2021; Hammer 2015). Via various theoretical lenses, these authors posit the salience of the senses and society nexus, with the senses working as bearers, transmitters, and also shapers of culture. From our perspective, the role of the synaesthetic (in terms of the senses working in concert) or the “intersensorial”, as Hammer (2015) describes it, is also important. As portrayed below, the visual and aural were strongly interwoven in the sensory data from running and swimming practices, and often combined with other less sociologically-researched senses such as proprioception and thermoception (e.g., Allen-Collinson et al. 2018; McNarry et al. 2021).

With regard to the sensory dimensions of physical-cultural embodiment, a focused ethnographic and autoethnographic literature is beginning to develop, and here we can provide only indicative examples. This corpus, we should emphasize, is in addition to ethnographies where the sensory is not signaled as a key focus, but where it nonetheless features strongly and evocatively, for example, in Wacquant’s (2004) and Woodward’s (2006) ethnographies of boxing. Research strongly focused on the sensory aspects spans water-based physical cultures such as windsurfing, ocean sailing, and kayaking (Humberstone, Fox, and Brown 2017), competitive swimming (McNarry et al. 2020, 2021), marathon swimming (Throsby 2013), and scuba-diving (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2011; Merchant 2011). It also examines land-based sports such as cycling (Hammer 2015; Spinney 2006), cricket (Powis 2018), skateboarding (Bäckström 2014), distance-running (Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2006; Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2015), and triathlon (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018). The senses in other physical-cultural domains

have also been addressed, including in dance (Potter 2008; Ravn and Hansen 2013). However, at the time of writing, we found no ethnographies of sports or physical cultures that utilized an ethnomethodologically inspired approach to address the production of the senses in interaction and in physical-cultural “togetherness.”

Ethnomethodological Challenges

EM, with its roots in Husserl's (1970) phenomenology, draws on Schütz's (1967) social phenomenologically-inspired analyses of the social construction of everyday life using “common-sense” understandings and knowledge to make sense of particular contexts. For Schütz (1967), a primary epistemological problem was to uncover how such common sense is employed to make possible everyday understandings and social action within the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld). Positing that common-sense knowledge is constituted of *typifications*, he argued that these stereotypical constructs enable people to order the everyday world on a moment-to-moment basis, and are linked to practical activities (see also Benson and Hughes 1983). In the everyday “run of the mill” flow of life that characterizes the “natural attitude,” such typifications are generally taken-for-granted, tacitly held, and operationalized. Drawing on these insights, Garfinkel's (1967, 2002) creation, EM, comprised the study of the methods members of a social group use to “do” everyday life, and to engage in “going about knowing the world” (Benson and Hughes 1983, 56). Ethnomethods are thus “locally produced, *in vivo*, locally situated members' practices as they meaningfully engage with, make sense of and give sense to, the world and others around them” (Jenkins 2006, 958). EM now spans a diverse range of strands and research practices. In general, though, we note that ethnomethodologists engage in detailed empirical work of direct close observation and analysis of the “observable practices” that make up the production of ordinary social life (Lynch 2001). The role of the sensing body is highly salient in that production.

Here, we investigate and portray the ways in which distance runners and performance swimmers go about the interactional production and communication of “doing-together” drawing on sensory practices. We are thus interested in examining these activities as a “collection of methodic practices” (Ryave and Schenkein 1975). Commensurate with Lynch's (2001) argument, we note that the ethnomethodological challenge centers on establishing analytically the empirical production of order in specific contexts. This does not mean, however, that our analysis is necessarily confined to one bounded situation; rather, we are in agreement with Tavory's (2018) notion of thinking between situations, in that situations are relational and can be compared and

contrasted. This allows us to draw on memories, including sensory memories, to anticipate and also shape unfolding situations, while also “doing” the particular activity at hand. While we draw on talk and conversational snippets in our data extracts below, we do not employ conversation analysis *per se*, given that our ethnomethodological focus is on a wider range of embodied practices.

The Research

The findings derive from two research projects within an overarching program investigating physical-cultural embodiment: 1) autoethnographic and auto-phenomenographic research on distance running, and 2) an ethnographic study of performance swimmers, both of which generated data amenable to an ethnomethodologically-sensitive analysis. The running research was undertaken by the first author, Jacquelyn, and a running-partner, as two linked projects: a 2-year joint autoethnography of distance runners (Allen-Collinson and Hockey 2015; Hockey and Allen-Collinson 2006),² and an autoethnographic/autophenomenographic study of women’s distance-running training, with data initially collected intensively and systematically over a 2-year period, and then more sporadically subsequently, up to the present time. These linked projects involve what Rossing and Scott (2016, 1) have termed “radical participatory” embodied methods, where the researcher is herself/himself a full participant in the activity investigated. In both these projects, recording of experiences was undertaken primarily via micro-tape recorders, field notes, and more latterly mobile phone, with recordings made during or as soon as practicable after training sessions.

The ethnographic research on performance swimmers was undertaken by the second author, Gareth, as part of a linked program of research addressing sensory embodiment in physical cultures, incorporating the running projects described earlier, together with a range of other sports and physical cultures. The swimming project was undertaken over a period of 3 years as a doctoral project. Although not a full participant in regard to undertaking the daily practice of swim-training, Gareth, a former competitive swimmer and coach himself, adopted the position of volunteer assistant within a performance swimming program based in the UK. This role accorded him privileged access to a number of senior performance swimmers and their daily practices and experiences. Data collection was undertaken by overt participant observation and also via semi-structured lifeworld interviews. Observational data were collected primarily over two intense, 5-week immersions in the field. In total, 90 training sessions, both in the pool and in the gym and conditioning

room, were observed, lasting between 60 and 150 min. Notes were taken to record the timings and type of training undertaken, and also the swimmers' actions, expressions, behaviors, and social interactions. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted, for which participants were opportunistically sampled. In total, 19 interviews were conducted with 12 male and 7 female athletes, aged 18–22 years, who had competed at a minimum of British Championship level. Competing at this level requires a high degree of commitment to, and familiarity with, performance swimming, and thus helped ensure that participants were in a position to provide rich, detailed, in-depth descriptions of their swimming practices and lifeworld.

The aforementioned projects constitute what Garfinkel (1996; see also Rouncefield and Tolmie 2013, 8) termed “hybrid” research, where researchers are also competent members of the setting under study. As long-term practitioners of distance running and performance swimming, respectively, between them, the authors have thus some confidence in fulfilling Garfinkel's (2002, 175) “unique adequacy requirement” to be “vulgarly competent” in the local production of the phenomena being investigated. As Sharrock and Randall (2016) argue, at a minimum, this suggests that such “vulgar competence” entails the recognition of skill or competence in such a way that we can grasp what it means to be “good” at a job or activity. In our data-sets, the salience of sensory work as undertaken and communicated in interaction was identified as being essential to the accomplishment of running and swimming. In the data extracts presented below, pseudonyms are used.

Sensory Production

Our findings revealed the importance of the sensing body in social interaction, which helped create and shape the lived spaces of training, whether in the indoor-pool environment or outdoors on running routes. Several key sensory modalities were identified in the data, some of which we have discussed previously, including vis-à-vis senses beyond the traditional “Western” sensorium, such as thermoception (Allen-Collinson et al. 2018; McNarry et al. 2020). In this article, however, it is two “traditional” sensory domains upon which we focus, in investigating the social organization and production of the auditory and the visual. These were found to be particularly amenable to EM-sensitive accounting practices, in terms of being observable and reportable by, and between, runners and swimmers in their physical-cultural settings. Nuanced sensory work was found to be requisite for the interactional achievement of running-together, and swimming-together, including via refined auditory work, as we next consider.

Auditory Attunement

Headed out on the Pittville Park route this evening. At the roundabout we concentrate on monitoring traffic coming from three ways; the busiest direction cannot be seen as vehicles accelerate around a corner immediate to us, which is partially obscured by a large tree and hopeless street lighting. The revving sound *Rrrrrrrrrah!* hits the brain, reverberating down the spine into the feet. When the sound is higher and more aggressive, we rock backwards and forwards, toe to heel, heel to toe, waiting for that gap in the traffic, impatient but telling each other to be careful, be patient, not take silly chances.

This extract from the joint autoethnographic study illustrates how runners employ “auditory attunement” (Allen-Collinson and Owton 2014), in this case to vehicles’ engine noise, in order to ascertain the proximity and velocity (and thus imminence of threat) of approaching traffic. As Bull and Back (2003) portray, “deep listening” in social life often requires detailed, auditory attention via attunement to the nuanced and multiple layers of meaning enfolded in sound. In outdoor running, such auditory attunement is used in assessing a range of aural cues, and is also interactionally produced and communicated to training partners, not least as a warning of danger and the need to act swiftly. In the running data, these acoustic cues were important when visibility was compromised, for example, when at risk of speeding cars on dark roads, barking or growling dogs approaching from behind, thundering hooves across foggy moorland, and ominously creaking overhead branches in a gale. The detection of such noises by one runner is often communicated via a brief warning “utterance” (Turner 1975) to co-runners, such as: “watch out, mad dog to left,” so as to give those co-present time to make adjustments and take avoidance action.

An important aural cue used to maintain “togetherness,” and sometimes explicitly communicated to others, relates to the noise of respiration, used to gauge another’s performance or more general state-of-being in a defined context. As Allen (2020) highlights, social theory has paid scant attention to air, breath, and breathing, despite their centrality to existence. Furthermore, Vannini et al. (2010, 331) argue for the communicative role of “non-symbolic sonorous expressions” such as sneezing and coughing, and to which we would add heavy, noisy breathing, wheezing, panting, and other indicators of respiratory difficulties. These forms of non-verbal communication often provide indications that are equally as informative, powerful, and evocative as are verbalizations. Breathing rate, noise, and style are important considerations as swimmers and runners attend to the breathing patterns of their co-participants in order to produce “doing-together.” From the running data, it was clear that training partners tuned in to each other’s respiratory patterns,

and subsequently made adjustments to their own pace, so as to maintain recognizable running-together or running “with” in Goffman’s (1971) terms. Each runner would reduce her/his pace, for example, when cognizant that the breathing of the other was heavier, more labored, rasping, or ragged than usual:

A bit of a rough session for J. this evening. Lots of heat all day and the humidity just builds relentlessly, and lots of pollen too, so pretty tough conditions for distance running – particularly for someone with asthma. Up the slope by the tennis courts she was labouring hard, and I could hear her breathing much more heavily than normal when she usually just floats up quietly. By the time we got to the bottom of the park she was sucking in the oxygen desperately like she was racing, so I dropped the pace and she gave me a little smile.

The specificity of the situation is crucial here, commensurate with the EM perspective, for if heavy, labored breathing is identified as “normal,” is directly associated with increased demands generated by the activity and context (e.g., ascending a steep incline, running over boggy, saturated moorland, or quagmire fields) then concern would not usually be expressed or observable. No situational adjustment would be deemed necessary. In the earlier data extract, the non-asthmatic running partner is highly attuned to the auditory indicators of his training partner, and makes a situational adjustment to ensure that running-together is achieved and maintained.

Analogously, performance swimmers are attuned to respiration, and usually have a distinctive breathing pattern for each of their strokes. During normal, low-intensity swimming, freestyle swimmers often choose to breathe every two, three, or four strokes, while butterfly swimmers might breathe every two strokes. For breaststroke and backstroke, breathing patterns are somewhat different, with breaststrokers breathing every stroke, and backstrokers able to breathe as needed. During high-intensity workouts, these breathing patterns do not significantly alter, but as three of the four stroke types require a moment when the face is fully submerged, this places emphasis on the rhythm and timing of breathing. Furthermore, the sprint freestyle and butterfly swimmers typically do not inhale at all during their 50 m events. This is an important, embodied skill they must develop to cope with the relative lack of oxygen while continuing to work at maximum capacity. Performance swimmers are trained in this skill by undertaking a number of shorter repetition swims at maximum effort with breathing. Bruce, a 50 m sprint freestyle and butterfly swimmer, reported this was a significant challenge, as there is “always pressure to breathe again straight away.” This focus on the breath during high-intensity workouts was also salient during rest intervals, where

the normal rhythm of the pool was punctuated by the sounds of heavy, labored breathing, as Gareth's fieldnote illustrates:

After round 1, Natasha comments on how that 9x25m relay is one of the hardest things they have had to do. It's the getting out and getting back on the block, and for her it's an even shorter time as she is working with Logan and Luke who are swimming 10-second 25s [25 metre repeats] whereas she is 12, which gives one of them a little longer rest. After each round these guys are blowing heavy and hard. It takes them 2-3 minutes of just sitting or floating around to normalise their breathing once again in order to be able to begin their 300m recovery. After the 2nd set, Natasha is just sat on the side, elbows on knees, head dropped, just sucking air into her lungs like it's going out of fashion, using her inhaler to help open the airways.

The sounds of respiration thus constitute a powerful auditory indicator to co-swimmers and to coaches as to the degree of effort in the specific context, and/or how hard the workout is proving to be. This was not the only way in which coaches would use sound cues in order to evaluate the swimmers' efforts, as a field note testifies:

The slow, low intensity level of the session this morning gives me the opportunity just to watch and to listen again to the sport. There is the rhythmic tap of certain swimmers' hands or arms entering the water as they swim freestyle. Others do this silently. It's eerie to watch someone silently slip past you through the water, not making a sound. There is also the noise of water being moved by bodies as they move through it. A sort of low grumble/murmur as if it is displeased that these human bodies are in it. This noise definitely becomes more of a roar when the swimmers put down the power/speed. I can't help think if the water is growling in pain as bodies cut it up and splash/spray it as they move through.

As experienced lifeworld members, coaches were also highly attentive to the sound of hands entering the water. If this was discerned and "coded" as generating a "slap" rather than a quieter, smooth entry, coaches interpreted and communicated this as indicative of a technical error in need of intervention and correction. Similarly, any changes in the rumbling, thunderous sound normally generated by swimmers' leg-kicks during high-intensity sets allowed coaches to detect when swimmers became fatigued or effort levels dropped, heralded by a decrease in "rumbling." The importance of developing such auditory knowledge (Rice 2010) has also been noted by Powis (2018) in relation to how blind and partially-sighted cricketers learn to attend to non-linguistic sounds such as those made by a cricket ball whirring through the air, in order to make situational adjustments on the cricket pitch.

Linguistic sounds, too, were important indicators, but for both the runners and the swimmers, opportunities for extended conversation were limited by the often intense, physical demands engendered by the training context, including being underwater. This left little scope for lengthy talk or full conversations. The vocabulary employed could, however, prove illuminative of practitioners' state of being. Particularly colorful language or intense swearing would provide members with aural indicators of someone struggling with the demands of the activity. During a swimming session, for example, this usually began with low-key utterances between swimmers, such as: "I'm blowing" or "I'm hurting." If, however, these feelings persisted or progressed, or if the coaches explicitly asked the swimmers how they were feeling, then richer vocabulary would be elicited, with terms such as: "destroyed," "dead," "numb," "wrecked," "shite," "broken," or "heavy" all used to communicate to other members the levels of fatigue and pain felt. Seeking to unpick their tacit knowledge, Gareth asked the swimmers if these terms were relatively synonymous, to which his participants responded affirmatively, noting that these were all terms prevalent with the performance-swimming lifeworld. They further explained that the various terms, with the exception of "heavy," could be neatly summarized under one succinct but evocative term: "fucked."

The use of the term "heavy" was indexical in EM terms; that is, in the context of swimming-training, it had a precise meaning, as the swimmers explained to Gareth. "Heavy" referred more to an absence of "feel for the water," than to feelings of tiredness or muscle soreness, as in more general sporting terminology. Frank, for example, described how he could feel fine in his mind-body self, but nevertheless "heavy in the water" as his "feel and speed weren't there." In the swimmers' talk, "feel for the water" pertained to an ability to catch hold of the water, to "grip" it, so as to pull through it more efficiently. Without this feel, hands would seem to slip through the water without purchase. The *haecceity* (Garfinkel and Wieder 1992) or "just-this-ness" of the water and specific aquatic context also emerged as salient, for a change in pool, or in the water of any given pool (its temperature, chemical content, and age of water), rendered "the catch" problematic in the changing environment.

On the interactional level, both swimmers and runners were also highly attuned to any mismatch between an utterance made by a co-participant regarding their bodily state, and visual indicators of that state, should the two appear to be in tension. Members of the running and performance-swimming lifeworlds share a common emphasis on learning to endure and to engage in interactional "endurance work" (see Allen-Collinson et al. 2018; McNarry et al. 2020). Members become socialized into, and familiar with, a particular understanding and language of pain, fatigue, suffering, and endurance.

Further, this was noted to have a moral dimension. So, in both running and swimming contexts, should someone's verbal assertions not match their actions or bodily markers of fatigue or exhaustion, as visually identified, then other members would notice, "mark" the dissonance, and often remark. For instance:

Charles: You can tell when people say it and they don't mean it as well.

Like if someone just says it because everyone else is saying it. . .

Wade: you can tell

[. . .]G: How?

Charles: Cos. . .

Eddie: By how they're actually doing.

Charles: If they can like back-end the set, or like max the last rep, you can tell they're not really hurting (Group Interview).

Such observations often generated sarcastic remarks from the swimmers when suspecting a fellow-swimmer of "saving it" (saving energy), contra swimming-group norms, rather than giving full commitment to the training session. In this context, it was clear that visual, observational "evidence" shaped swimmers' responses to a co-swimmer's verbal statement regarding her/his state of being, with visual cues being accorded more credence in such instances. It is to the visual dimension of sensory physical-cultural embodiment and interaction that we next turn.

Vision and Intercorporeality

Anthropologists, sociologists, and geographers are amongst those social scientists emphasizing how sensory experience is shaped via socio-cultural frameworks, but vision has only rarely been analyzed as a sociological phenomenon, *produced* in social interaction (Simmel 1970; Sudnow 1972; Weinstein and Weinstein 1984). Ethnomethodologists, in contrast, have developed a small, but rich corpus of work that examines seeing as intricate, complex, and interactionally achieved (e.g., Corsby and Jones 2020; Sharrock and Coulter 1998; vom Lehn et al. 2017). Thus, "doing seeing" and the development of a distinctive "vis-ability" (Schindler 2018) as a skilled way of seeing, relevant to the specific task at hand, are achieved in very different ways by different social groups. Occupational groups have been analyzed in ethnomethodological research on the visual: Hockey (2009), for example, explores the ways in which infantry soldiers see terrain, while Goodwin and Goodwin (1998) describe how certain airport workers see planes, vom Lehn et al. (2017) analyze how optometrists "do" assessing vision, and Corsby and

Jones (2020) consider how soccer coaches see performance. “Doing seeing” in leisure pursuits has also been subjected to analysis, for example, in fly fishing (Lynch 2013). People must therefore work at seeing (as with all sensory work), so that what is seen, acknowledged, and registered as seen, depends upon the specific context and on the stock of knowledge garnered via socialization into a particular category membership.

For runners and swimmers, seeing and otherwise having an awareness of not only one’s own body in space (proprioception), but also in relation to other bodies (“alteroception”) is often essential when training-together, not least to avoid collisions. Runners and swimmers must be intersubjectively and intercorporeally aware and attuned. Not only is auditory attunement to others required, as portrayed earlier, but also visual awareness of the spatial distribution of training partners and teammates. Here, Sudnow’s (1972) analysis of “the glance” is highly apposite. Sudnow considers the importance and efficacy of the glance as a rapid visual assessment method, especially pertinent in contexts where this swift mode of looking is the only practicable, or socially permissible, means of doing seeing. This might apply in public spaces, for example, where more extended, directed, focused looking at others would likely provoke unease and discomfort in the target of such gaze, strongly breaching norms of “civil inattention” (Goffman 1963). During distance running and performance swimming, extended looking or staring at co-performers is unusual, if not impossible, due to the physical demands and constraints of the activity. Furthermore, for swimmers, rapid movement through the aquatic environment means that vision is often blurred by bubbles or turbulence, or misted goggles.

Runners, particularly when running cross-country or on uneven surfaces, must visually check and appraise the upcoming ground, frequently shifting their gaze from the immediate foreground to more distally and back again—in order to anticipate upcoming surfaces before they are haptically encountered. Runners often communicate to running partners the results of their visual assessment, sharing the sensory information gleaned, and providing co-runners with the benefit of “foresight” regarding potential hazards of terrain. Utterances such as “watch out - tree root!”, “it’s real slippery here” provide advance warning to those following. Human-generated hazards are also visually identified and communicated, as illustrated in the following field note:

Back through the gates and a sharp left down the narrow gloomy underpass which connects the other half of the park, a subway for some idiot, mad cyclists, unsupervised dogs and toddlers (. . .) trying to see to place my feet. At certain times of the year, inebriated hordes returning from the racecourse empty their

bladders from a balustrade above (. . .) “Watch out, Bud,” I shout backwards to J, “there’s a crowd of sots on the bridge!” Even in the gloom, I can see – and smell – an alcohol-fuelled, shambling mass. We both then move to the left side of the underpass, hoping to avoid any errant “showers.”

As portrayed in this data extract, in the moment, here-and-now sensory information may be combined with experiential knowledge, gleaned over time and previous lived experience of distinctive situations—temporal and spatial. This knowledge is often shared between regular training partners and communicated in short-hand forms. In the earlier statement, for example, shared knowledge of previous encounters in the particular context shapes runners’ expectations and avoidance action, so that visual identification of the typified race-goer means that no extended explanation of the implications of drunken punters’ behavior is required. This observation also coheres with Tavory’s (2018) notion of “thinking between situations,” where contexts are compared and contrasted with remembered analogous situations, allowing social actors to anticipate events and take appropriate courses of action.

Further elements relating to vision, intersubjectivity and intercorporeality point to the need for reflexivity in running and swimming, in order to achieve running-with and swimming-with others. Germane to our analysis is Weeks’ (1996) ethnomethodological perspective on the achievement of synchrony in a concert performance. Here, musicians, employing their insider knowledge, must take into account the actions of other performers in a form of “practical reflexivity” requiring interpretation and anticipation. An analogous reflexivity is required in the ongoing achievement of swimming- and running-together, not so much in terms of precise synchronicity of bodily movement (other than in synchronized swimming, perhaps), but in avoiding—and being seen to strive to avoid—painful limb-collisions across swimming lanes, or “cutting-up” another’s running lane or trajectory. Our observations also draw on a classic ethnomethodological analysis by Ryave and Schenkein (1975) of the navigational problem of walking. Their observations highlight the ways in which walkers sharing the same footways manage *not* to collide with other walkers, or indeed with other physical obstacles (see also a recent ethnomethodologically-inspired blog by Laurier et al. (2020) on walking in a time of Covid-19 social-distancing requirements). Avoidance of collision requires concerted visual work and self-management on the part of those co-present, whether on land or in water.

For competitive, pool-based swimmers, this visual work can be more intense and concentrated than for walkers, given that swimmers undertake their training (and racing) within the bounds of 2–2.5 m wide swimming lanes, moving at considerable speed, and with limited opportunities for looking.

Swimmers often train with more than two swimmers per lane, requiring them to swim in a circular pattern around the pool, alternating clockwise and anti-clockwise by lanes, to avoid clashes. Such circling means that from time to time as swimmers pass each other, if they are not concentrating sufficiently, they can clash hands:

As I am talking with Nick, there is suddenly a very audible slap originating from the pool. As we both look up, Jean is turning towards Bucky and exclaims [with understated irony] how she didn't really need her left hand anymore. Bucky apologises to Jean, they both shake their hands off and begin swimming again.

Such corporeal collision is, however, a rare occurrence, especially when considering how frequently swimmers pass each other in each session. The aforementioned instance underscores the "remarkability" of such collision. It also reminds us that the achievement of "doing-together" may require maintaining a certain "apartness" in order to safely produce the togetherness.

The visual work and active intercorporeal surveillance, however, subtle and tacit, required of skilled swimmers in relation to other swimmers who share the lived space of the swimming pool, can be intense. Such awareness, while often requiring visual work and auditory attunement as portrayed, might also draw on other senses, such as the haptic. For instance, as swimmers converge together at the end of their lanes between reps, they are usually in close proximity. At this time, they can see, feel and hear how co-swimmers are performing. The sound of heavy labored breathing and the touch of a fellow swimmer's panting breath on one's exposed skin, provide multi-sensory indications, and also feelings of togetherness and the collectivity or "congregation" in EM terminology. Such feelings of elemental sharing can also give rise to a sense of "somatic empathy" (Allen-Collinson et al. 2016) grounded in shared bodily feelings as well as shared air, space, and time. Matthew noted the importance of both intersubjective and intercorporeal attunement in being recognized as a "good" member of a swimming team:

[It's just a case of being able to empathise naturally and feel the presence of someone around you, that's important, if you're going to be a good team-mate.

With regard to running bodies' intercorporeality, when traversing footways that are narrow and constricted, co-runners can find themselves so closely confined as to be touching, giving rise to sometimes uncomfortable haptic sensations of bumping and jostling. These feelings can be intense in the competitive pushing and shoving of track running, with painfully

colliding elbows and feet. In that context, such corporeal collisions may be deemed an acceptable by-product of accomplishing racing. Even when training-together in the more open spaces of cross-country and road running, pathways can at times become narrow and confined, for example, through dense woodland. Avoiding collisions with, and the “cutting up” of a co-runner, requires a good deal of visual attention, effort, monitoring, and (re) adjustment of position and trajectory to achieve running-together amicably.

As Ryave and Schenkein (1975) note, collision with other pedestrians is a regular and routine hazard for those traversing public spaces. In addition to regulation by laws and local byelaws, these spaces are also subject to indeterminate, largely tacit, taken-for-granted rules of interactional conduct. In the majority of cases recorded in the running research, other pedestrians (and sometimes cyclists also) appeared to expect that the intercorporeal onus was on runners to make all efforts to take avoidance action when approaching walkers. This expectation was observable and communicated via, for example, hard stares (in stark contrast to the interactional subtlety of the “glance”), accompanied by staying resolutely on the same trajectory. More rarely, audible tutting and sighing would be forthcoming, should walkers feel obliged to adjust trajectory to accord space to runners. Although EM is not so much concerned with the *whys* of such behavior but rather with the *hows*, our own members’ theory-making gave rise to speculation that this was perhaps due to the activity of running *per se*; as this was a minority, “deviant” activity in comparison to the vast majority of pedestrians who were walking. Walkers thus appeared to consider it incumbent on runners to cede way, rather than vice versa, and communicated this expectation.

Concluding Thoughts

Phenomenologists and other theorists of the everyday have long emphasized that we must not inadvertently leave unacknowledged and unexplored the mundane, concrete practices of everyday life, given that such shared practices are constitutive of social life. While a rich literature on the socio-cultural framing of the senses has developed in recent decades, the detailed practices and achievement of sensing in everyday *social interaction* still remain under-researched, as has recently been highlighted (Corsby and Jones 2020; Gibson and vom Lehn 2019; Vannini, Waskul, and Gottschalk 2013). This article has sought to address that research lacuna and to contribute original insights to the senses as practical accomplishments, achieved and communicated in social interaction in specific physical-cultural contexts. Here, we have employed an ethnomethodological framework, to date under-utilized in sensory ethnographic work. We have thus examined some of the

actual instances of “doing” and co-producing with others the activities of running-together and swimming-together, along with the (sometimes intense) sensory work involved in such interactional productions. In doing so, we have sought to remain within the spirit of EM in that we are not so concerned with “the business of explanation. . . of abstracting from witnessed appearances and constructing master narratives or models” (Crabtree et al. 1999, 670), but rather with the close analysis of the everyday sensory practices of distance runners and competitive swimmers in defined interactional contexts. As Zimmerman and Pollner (1973) emphasize, EM eschews explanation and urges the researcher to treat practice as a topic of inquiry through and through, rather than a resource for building explanatory constructs.

Our aim here has thus been to examine closely, and provide detailed observations of the mundane, but also intense, complex, nuanced, and intricate practices involved in accomplishing running-together and swimming-together. This ongoing interactional work requires not only proprioceptive but also intercorporeal awareness. The intensity of such work is revealed to us in contexts of running-alone or swimming-alone, which, while undoubtedly demanding of concentration and hard physical labor, do not necessitate the additional attention to intercorporeality required to produce togetherness in the same settings. EM encourages us to focus on the accomplishment of “doing together” by social actors, who demonstrate via observable, audible, and tangible *practices* that they are competent members of a particular community or “membership category” in EM parlance. In its focus on practice(s), EM is not unique, of course. Indeed, our ethnomethodologically-inspired perspective contributes to a vibrant strand in ethnography, which focuses on the detailed examination of embodied practices as socio-culturally framed and developed. Ethnographic studies have, for example, also drawn on a Bourdieusian framework, to explore the development of habitus as forged through practice, in both physical cultures (e.g., Doane 2006) and occupational cultures (e.g., O’Connor 2005), to give but two instances. The employment of an ethnomethodological perspective allows us to sharpen the focus on the “doing” of sensing and sensuousity, and on the sensory self as “produced” in specific interactional contexts. Here, we have chosen to focus on the “intersensoriality” (Hammer 2015) of hearing and sight, but there are myriad other varieties of sensory braiding, worthy of ethnographic investigation in these and other physical cultures, and via different theoretical and conceptual frameworks.


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Notes

1. Both these projects were completed before the Covid-19 pandemic and the restrictions on movement, social activities, and “togetherness,” which commenced in the UK in March 2020.
2. The co-runner/researcher, John Hockey, has kindly given permission for data extracts to be used herein.

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